



MOUNTAINS RECREATION & CONSERVATION AUTHORITY

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MEMORANDUM

TO: The Governing Board

FROM: 
Joseph T. Edmiston, FAICP, Executive Officer

DATE: March 2, 2005

SUBJECT: **Agenda Item VII: Report and discussion on transfer of operations and maintenance responsibilities of Augustus F. Hawkins Natural Park from the Mountains Recreation and Conservation Authority to the City of Los Angeles.**

Staff Recommendation: No Board action is required as this report is provided for informational purposes only.

Background: The conception and eventual construction of what is now, by all measurement, the extraordinary Augustus F. Hawkins Natural Park at the corner of Slauson and Compton Avenues in Los Angeles was the result of a collaborative effort between the City of Los Angeles, the Santa Monica Mountains Conservancy and the Mountains Recreation and Conservation Authority (MRCA). The park is constructed on land owned by the Los Angeles Department of Water and Power. The City of Los Angeles entered into a Park Development Agreement on November 14, 1997 with the Santa Monica Mountains Conservancy and MRCA, the purpose of the which was to "delineate the roles of the SMMC and MRCA as well as the CITY relative to the development, construction, maintenance and operations of the PARK FACILITY." The park opened in 2000.

The Construction of the Park was funded largely by the Safe Neighborhood Park Act of 1996 (Los Angeles County Proposition A) and LA FOR KIDS, City Wide Parks, Recreation and Community Facilities Assessment (Los Angeles City Proposition K) funds. As originally contemplated, the Conservancy and MRCA were to build the park on the City land, and the City was to provide the funds through the Proposition A and K grant programs to maintain the park.

Section 7: Services, Maintenance and Security Requirements states:

Based on current park design, which is the result of intense community participation, the following services will be a necessary part of the on going operation of the PARK FACILITY. The SMMC, or its designee, the MRCA, agrees to provide the following ongoing services, ***subject to the release of Proposition A and K Servicing and Maintenance funds in a timely manner*** (emphasis added), and otherwise at no cost to the City.

- (a) Law Enforcement Services
- (b) Groundskeeping Services
- (c) Visitor facilities (including environmental education staff)
- (d) Custodial Services
- (e) Other Necessary Services

Discussion: The annual budget for service and maintenance of the park is approximately \$400,000—not including any education and interpretation programming or staff. To partly provide for these funds, the City had, in 2001, assigned its rights to \$198,000 annually from the City of Los Angeles Proposition A Maintenance and Servicing Allocation to the MRCA. The remainder of the service and maintenance funding for the park was to come from Proposition K funding.

Proposition K funding, however, has been largely problematic. The grant funding is awarded on a reimbursable basis, in a competitive process up to two years in arrears, with new funding guidelines developed after the funds have already been expended. There is no guarantee that the MRCA will, in fact, receive the Proposition K funds it budgets for each year. Further, the reimbursements take almost a full year after the grants have been awarded. Indeed—and incredibly—the MRCA has yet to be fully reimbursed for expenditures advanced since fiscal year 2001-2002.

On a separate track, the City of Los Angeles applied for and was awarded a \$100,000 Proposition 13 grant to construct a wetlands habitat at the Augustus F. Hawkins Park. While the City's plan was to proceed with immediate construction of the habitat, the grant did not include, and the City did not intend to provide, any funds for ongoing maintenance of what has been described as the City's "first constructed wetland," and stormwater retention basin. By MRCA estimates, the annual increased maintenance cost would exceed \$20,000 in staff and materials.

After several meetings between the Conservancy and Councilmember Jan Perry, and with no other funding source beyond Proposition K identified, the City proposed that its Department of Recreation and Parks (DRP) take full responsibility for the operations, service and maintenance of the park from the MRCA. As an original partner in the development of the park, DRP recognizes the special character of the

park and its importance to the community that it serves. In addition to service and maintenance, DRP, through its community forestry program will be able to provide a budget for education and interpretation programs and community programming that the MRCA is no longer able to sustain. Staff is confident that the DRP will continue to operate the park at the high standards of the Conservancy and the MRCA and that the work of the Conservancy and the MRCA will have a lasting impact at the Augustus F. Hawkins Natural Park in Central Los Angeles.

The maintenance responsibilities will transfer to the City on March 15, 2005.